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TECH TALK

Tennessee Technology Access Project

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TTAP SEEKS MORE CONSUMER INPUT

By Kevin R. Wright, Executive Director

The Tennessee Technology Access project has relied on the Statewide Advisory Council as its primary source of consumer input and guidance for more than ten years. That guidance has served TTAP and the state of Tennessee well. Each current and former member has given their expertise, skill and personal stories to ensure that the assistive technology needs of consumers and their families are being met. Without the council's input, Tennessee would not have the level of awareness and technology related services that it has today.

However, recent years have seen a reduction in the Council's effectiveness and member participation. Therefore, in order to meet our goals and mission, TTAP found it necessary to develop new ways to gain valuable consumer input into the programs and activities we conduct. We believe that we have developed such a strategy.

Below is a comprehensive plan of gaining consumer input that replaces the TTAP Statewide Advisory Council (SAC). With the involvement of consumers and their families at all levels of this plan, TTAP will continue to serve as the resource that our communities turn to for state-of-the-art information and guidance on assistive technology in Tennessee.

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Public Forums:

In order to gain the most public input about TTAP programs, TTAP will conduct public forums in each area served by the five assistive technology centers in its network. These "town hall meeting" style forums will be conducted in the most user friendly manner possible to encourage the free exchange of ideas and experiences with TTAP staff and other participants. Through these forums, we hope to get a sense of where we are and where we should be going so that we may best meet the needs of consumers and their families.

Assistive Technology Center Boards/Advisory Councils:

TTAP will work much more closely with the consumer directed boards and councils of each technology center. Those boards and councils will serve as yet another mechanism for consumer input on a local level. TTAP will also collaborate with the technology centers in developing a channel of communication to TTAP staff that will serve as a means for guidance on both center and community needs as technology programs are developed.

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From the Director...

Kevin Wright
Executive Director, TTAP

When most people hear the word sunset, images of a bright orange fire ball retreating behind a lush green mountain or sparkling off of a wave as it crashes to shore immediately come to mind. However, when I hear the word sunset, the picture that I see is somewhat different.

When the Technology Act was first conceived, the authors envisioned that the money that it would make available to states would be used to create a system of assistive technology information that would over time be self-supporting. That so called “Sunset Provision” dictates that states will no longer receive federal funding beyond the 13th year with the expectation that local or state money would replace the lost federal dollars. However, for Tennessee and many other states, the system was created but the local funds to continue to operate that system have not been generated. It is hoped that state and local funding will be developed and that funding to the technology centers from the Division of Rehabilitation Services will continue. It is my desire to see improvement funding this session from the legislature for both TTAP and the Division of Rehabilitation Services so that we may continue to serve the technology needs of consumers and their families.

However, if the sunset provision is not removed and no state or local dollars are found, TTAP will no longer be here to provide information about and increase the capacity for the provision of assistive technology devices and services. Without the awareness about the availability of devices, many individuals may not have the tools that they need to reach their goals of independence.

For more information about the sunset provision of the act and how it may affect you and your family, please contact my office at Toll Free: 1-800-732-5059; Nashville Area: 615-532-3122; TTY: 615-741-4566; Fax: 615-532-4685 or Email: kevin.r.wright@state.tn.us.

From the Commisioner...

Carl Brown
Assistant Commossioner, DRS

The TTAP State Advisory Council (SAC) has served TTAP and consumers across Tennessee well. We thank those members whose commitment and dedication has helped people who have disabilities realize their goal of independence with the use of assistive technology.

However, budget restrictions have impacted that Council’s ability to meet on a regular basis. The lack of regular meetings among other things has reduced the Council’s effectiveness and member participation. Therefore, after much discussion with the SAC Chair and the Technology Access Center Directors, it has been decided to replace the SAC with a new strategy to seek broader input from consumers, professionals, educators and the community at large.

We hope to accomplish our goal of gaining more input from users and potential users of assistive technology by conducting five public forums across the state during the current State fiscal year (July 02 through June 03). The forums will be coordinated by Kevin Wright, TTAP Executive Director, with assistance from the Technology Access Centers. All input will be consolidated and shared with all technology-related service providers and will be used to develop future planning for TTAP. It is anticipated that direct input from consumers and their families will greatly improve TTAP’s ability to identify and respond to the assistive technology needs of our diverse Tennessee communities.

The schedule of the public forums will be disseminated as broadly as possible through mail outs, email and local media. I encourage everyone to attend and share your thoughts with us. Your input is vital if we are going to continue to meet the assistive technology needs of all consumers.

The Centers' Corner

ETTAC

By Alice Wershing, M.Ed., Educational Technology Coordinator

ETTAC will host its annual Toy Tech Holiday Party on December 9, from 4 pm to 6:30 pm. Toy Tech is funded by United Ways of Blount, Knox and Jefferson Counties; Boys of Christmas; Levi-Strauss; and individuals. Donations of toys to be adapted are accepted as well as requests for toys by families of individuals with disabilities prior to the event.

The purpose of this event is to provide toys to children with disabilities who are unable to play with traditional toys. The majority of the toys given are switch-adapted toys. Volunteers and ETTAC staff assist in adapting the toys and creating switch modifications prior to the event on December 9. UPS will deliver toys to children with disabilities in East Tennessee who are unable to attend the party. For more information or to make a donation of money, toys, materials or food for the party, call (865) 219-0130.

Oak Ridge Observes Disability Employment & Assistive Technology Awareness Month

By Ron Emrich, Director of Operations

Dinah Cohan, U. S. Department of Defense, Director of the Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP) delivered the keynote address during an observance of Disability Employment and Assistive Technology Awareness Month on October 23, at the Oak Ridge Mall.

CAP is a program that provides assistive technology and accommodation services to employees with disabilities throughout the federal government. Cohen and the CAP office have been nationally recognized as leaders in this field.

The observance, sponsored by the Department of Energy, DOE contractors, Tennessee Division of Rehabilitation Services, and community organizations, included assistive technology exhibits, employment and disability awareness information, and presentation of a proclamation signed by Governor Don Sundquist, declaring the month of October as Disability Employment and Assistive Technology Awareness Month.

STAR CENTER

By Judy Duke, Manager of Outreach, Information, and Advocacy

Despite pouring rain on Saturday, Sept. 13th, the STAR Center's first KidsFest reigned. The on-again, off-again rain sent some people running for shelter under the Amphitheater at the Casey Jones Village. However, Bob the Builder, the big attraction, brought around 3,500 parents and children to the event.

Other activities included face painting, arts and crafts, clowns, petting zoo, inflatable playground, Jackson Energy Authority bucket truck rides, music, puppet show, Civil War re-enactment camp, cultural awareness and more.

Manning all the activities were approximately 200 volunteers from area high schools and colleges as well as the STAR Board and Staff and their families.

Beth James, Development manager, has already begun plans for KidsFest 2003 which will be bigger, better and hopefully dry.

TAC

By Linda Judeich, Director of Services

Training future professionals about assistive technology is an important way to improve assistive technology services in the future. TAC staff members work cooperatively with faculty members at several area universities and technical schools by providing guest lectures, demonstrations, and/or hands-on training with assistive technology hardware and software. Staff members have worked with students attending Belmont University, Tennessee State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Vanderbilt University, and Nashville Technical School. We work with students studying to become teachers in Special and General Education (classes focusing on Multiple Disabilities, Learning Disabilities, Educational Technology, Sensory Impairments, and other areas of specialization), and those in Occupational Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology, and Biomedical Engineering programs.

In addition to teaching activities, TAC staff members participate in a variety of other outreach activities to spread the word about assistive technology. These include presentations, workshops, and/or displays at conferences, presenting or hosting training, answering information requests and other activities. We hope that our efforts will result in improved assistive technology services for people with disabilities.

To learn more or inquire about a presentation, call 615-248-6733.

TECH TIP

Waves of Words: Augmented Communicators Read and Write
ISAAC Series: Volume 3

The challenges confronting individuals with severe communication disabilities are chronicled in *Waves of Words: Augmented Communicators Read and Write*. Edited by Karen Erickson, David Koppenhaver, and David Yoder. These ten well-told tales describe in detail techniques that can be used to assist individuals to develop literacy skills. *Waves of Words* includes a chapter written by Alice Wershing, ETTAC staff and Chris Hughes, ETTAC Vocational Rehabilitation Client. More information at <http://www.isaac-online.org/whatsnew.shtml>

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The Consumer Corner

By Erin Brady Worsham

Editors Note: The views expressed are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the Tennessee Technology Access Project, the Department of Human Services or the Division of Rehabilitation Services.

"On My Soapbox"

In 1996 I was as mad as hell about the growing silence that was threatening to engulf my life! Diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) in 1994, my hands were rapidly losing the ability to write and my speech was becoming unintelligible.

An astute healthcare professional recommended I get a communication device before I lost all my ability to move and speak, and while I still had private insurance, which was more likely to pay for it. This was before the days of enlightenment, when Medicare did not pay for such things.

In December of 1996, my Liberator communication device arrived from the Prentke Romich Company. Shortly after, I wrote my first entry in our 2-year-old son's journal with an infrared headpointer. It was an incredible feeling of freedom to be able to say exactly what I meant again!

Since that time, I have begun using a p-switch to make my hits, because my neck is little more than a wet noodle now. My husband Curry tapes the sensor disk between my eyebrows. When I raise my brow, it activates a quarter-by-quarter scan of the keys on the face of my Liberator. Another movement of my brow selects the quarter I want. Using the same method, I choose the row and the column.

For the uninitiated, this must sound terribly tedious. But when you are determined to say something, it is a godsend! And I am determined. During my rebellious teenage years, my father was wont to tell me to get off my soapbox! Now he's happy I have reason to stay on it.

Prior to my diagnosis I was an artist. From 1996 to 1999, I was content to use my Liberator to create word pictures and to speak. But in the summer of 1999 the unimaginable happened. Curry installed the Mike software, which allowed my Liberator to interface with our computer and move the mouse. I opened Microsoft Paint and drew a very crude face. To me, it was the Mona Lisa! I was able to draw by dragging the mouse and scanning a directional grid on the Liberator.

It's been two and a half years since I completed my first professional piece, "Big Wheels Keep on Turnin'." With each new work of art, I learn more about how to get what I want from the computer. Through e-mail I communicate with people all over the world.

Assistive technology, specifically augmentative communication, has given me back what ALS tried to take away. That is, my ability to connect to the world around me. Now, when I get angry, I fire off a letter to the editor. Just like anyone else.



"Big Wheels Keep on Turnin'"

By Erin Brady Worsham

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Surveys:

Each center has its own instrument for assessing the effectiveness and over-all customer satisfaction with the services provided by the center. TTAP will work with the centers in developing an effective means for collecting and reporting that data to TTAP on a quarterly basis. This quarterly reporting will allow TTAP and center staff more accurately determine whether the services being provided are adequately meeting the needs of consumers and their families and make periodic adjustments as needed.

TTAP will conduct its own surveys that will be designed to gauge the over-all state of assistive technology device and service provision in Tennessee. The data collect by the surveys will then be used in the development of future of assistive technology programs that target the needs identified.

To ensure that as many consumers and their families as possible have an opportunity to participate; TTAP will develop a web-based survey. The data will be collected in such a way that it may be efficiently incorporated into existing data collection and reporting mechanisms allowing us to effectively manage the data and respond appropriately.

Training:

In order to address the need for training TTAP in cooperation with the technology centers will develop a need assessment tool that will be incorporated with various training efforts. This assessment, designed for professionals, will help TTAP and the technology centers better identify both perceived and actual needs of the professionals supporting individuals and their families. Thus, allowing for better, more efficient and effective training for individuals, families and professionals.

We believe that this new multifaceted approach will serve to increase consumer input and feedback about the services that TTAP and its network of centers provides Tennesseans who have disabilities and their families as they lead independent, productive lives. This input is invaluable as TTAP strives to meet the assistive technology needs of consumers today and tomorrow.

Technology Centers

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